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South Africa

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The past

1. The nature and character of the South African struggle for freedom was unique in its international support. In its last years it became part of world consciousness as the international community joined the liberation movement in calling for the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners. News from South Africa was carried across the world by television network, by radio wave, by satellite and in print.

2. But, to this day, one of the most terrible and one of the most moving images of the apartheid years was that of the body of 13-year-old Hector Petersen, shot dead in Soweto on 16 June 1976, and carried in the arms of his friends. With them, as they run forward, is his sister in school uniform, her face full of rage and pain.

3. The history of South Africa began, of course, long before the Soweto uprising. Long, even, before the legalized oppression of apartheid began.

4. The people who originally lived in the land were hunter-gatherers known as the San and pastoralists known as the Khoi. They were joined about 1,700 years ago by farmers from east and central Africa who settled in the east of the country. Later came the Dutch colonists, followed by the British, the Anglo-Boer War and the struggle for the land. This is a better known period of early South African history and, indeed, was the only history served up to many decades of schoolchildren, told from one point of view.

5. But, through those years, another story unfolded. A story of slaves, many of them children, brought to the Cape Colony to serve the needs of the colonists. A story of generations of children born into slavery, for manumission was rare. A story of men and women forced off the land.

Of indentured labour from India and China. Of long hours of sweat and labour on the farms, on the docks and railways, on the mines and in white homes everywhere. It is a shameful story. One that has left its patterns and scars on the many people who inherited the badge of servitude and discrimination.

6. Finally, in 1948, apartheid became entrenched, a way of life protected by laws, enforced by practice and, as resistance grew, stamped into the lives of every South African. Hundreds of thousands of people were forcibly removed from their homes and millions from their land. All African adults were forced to carry passes which controlled their lives from dawn to dusk. Swift and often violent action followed every act of defiance.

7. Formal negotiations began in 1990 when Nelson Mandela and other political leaders were released and the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania and the South African Communist Party banned for decades, were unbanned. Exiled leaders returned and the talks began. It was nearly four years later that the negotiations at Kempton Park finally yielded an interim Constitution which satisfied most of the parties to the conflict.

8. In April 1994 South Africa held its first democratic elections, later that year Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as President and, in 1996, after another two years of debate and negotiations, the final South African Constitution was adopted.

The legacy

9. Over the years, the majority of South Africans experienced disadvantage, loss of dignity, repression and, often, terrible suffering. All South Africans, even those who clung to their privilege, experienced the disadvantage of growing up in a country in which authority took precedence over freedom.

10. It has left us with an education system, a social welfare system, a health system, a justice system, and a socio-economic system geared to meet the needs of only a small minority of the population. It has left us with a human condition that cries out for redress ... and with a generation of deeply disadvantaged and often traumatized children who need our special attention and care.

11. Inequity and deep deprivation is but one side of the story. Throughout South Africa's violent colonial past, children and youth have been victims of gross human rights violations.

The structure of Government

12. South Africa is a constitutional democracy. The Interim Constitution was a product of the negotiations process that began in 1990. After the elections, the Constitutional Assembly (consisting of both houses of Parliament) negotiated and drafted the new Constitution, which became an Act of Parliament in 1996. The Constitutional Court was created as the guardian of the Constitution.

13. The Constitution provides for a separation of powers. The Executive, which consists of the President, Deputy President, Cabinet and the State departments, is in charge of policy and administration. Parliament, the legislative body, consists of two houses: the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces. The National Assembly consists of 400 members, elected by proportional representation in a national election. The National Council of Provinces, a new structure designed to create a joint forum for South Africa's nine provinces, consists of equal representation from the provincial legislatures. Both houses are responsible for the passing of legislation.

14. The Constitution provides national, provincial and local spheres of government. The national government is mainly responsible for policy, while the provincial and local spheres are mainly responsible for implementation. The principle here is of cooperative government.

15. Each of the nine provinces has an elected legislature, and there are almost 850 local government structures in South Africa.

16. In addition, the Constitution requires the setting up of various independent bodies to promote democracy and human rights. These include the Human Rights Commission, the Commission on Gender Equality, the Office of the Public Protector, the Judicial Service Commission, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities.

The geography

17. South Africa is situated on the southern tip of Africa. It is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the Indian Ocean to the east. Its borders meet Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Mozambique. Lesotho is a landlocked country within the boundaries of South Africa. The total area of the country is approximately 1,219,080 square kilometres.

18. The interim Constitution created nine provinces*. This structural arrangement provided the basis for the first democratic elections in 1994 (see above). The provinces are the Eastern Cape, the Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, Northern Province, the North-West Province and the Western Cape.

19. The geography and climate of South Africa vary quite widely. About 65 per cent of South Africa receives less than 500 mm rain per annum - the minimum required for agriculture. The inland areas are also subject to regular periods of drought. Small parts of the country have an average annual rainfall of over 1,400 mm. The terrain includes savannah with mixed grasslands and trees, the dry Karoo and lush fynbos areas.

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* These replaced the four provinces, four nominally "independent" States or homelands and five "self-governing" territories which provided the geographical arrangement for the apartheid system.

The people

20. The first full South African census was conducted in 1996. The first preliminary estimates are of a population of 37,859,000. The population breakdown, based on the 1991 census, is approximately 76.3 per cent African, 8.5 per cent Coloured, 2.5 per cent Indian and 12.7 White. Of these, approximately 55.4 per cent of the population live in urban areas. The population discrepancies between provinces are worthy of note because of the vast income and living standard disparities between people living in urban and rural areas. In the Northern Province, 88.1 per cent of the population live in rural areas. In Gauteng 96.4 per cent live in urban areas.

21. Some of the poorest households in South Africa are headed by women. Some are headed by grandmothers or children who, by various means, attempt to support younger children. Poverty results in many households containing three or four generations. In rural areas, men are often away for long stretches.

22. Patterns of immigration are complex in South Africa. Destabilization by the apartheid government in countries to the north of South Africa (particularly in Mozambique) resulted in a large refugee population. Migrant workers, recruited for the mines and seeking work of other kinds, have flowed across the border over the years. This phenomenon continues. Recently, refugees and illegal immigrants began arriving from war-torn areas further north. In addition, the relative openness of the South African northern border, together with the difficulty in policing so long a perimeter, has exacerbated a serious increase in crime and the import of illegal substances.

The economy

23. South Africa has the largest economy in southern Africa. In 1994 South Africa accounted for 44 per cent of the combined gross national product of all countries in the sub-Saharan African region.

24. In 1996 South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 3.1 per cent, and real income per person is some 4.5 per cent above the 1993 level.

25. In 1995 the primary sector accounted for 14 per cent of South Africa's GDP, the secondary sector for 33 per cent, and the tertiary sector for 54 per cent. Mining and quarrying are major industries within the primary sector, together accounting for 9 per cent of GDP. Manufacturing is the major component of the secondary sector, being 25 per cent of GDP.

26. In 1996, South Africa launched a long-term economic strategy known as GEAR: Growth, Employment and Redistribution. GEAR emphasizes fiscal and monetary discipline, higher international competitiveness, private sector investment and job creation. The GEAR strategy projects a medium-term real growth rate of 6 per cent, and anticipates a 4.5 per cent per annum average growth thereafter.

Income distribution

27. South Africa is characterized by extremes of wealth and poverty. Although it is classified as a middle-income developing country, the vast majority of the people are extremely poor. The Gini coefficient (0.68) is one of the two highest in the world. Ninety-five per cent of the poor are African and 75 per cent of the poor live in the rural areas.

Unemployment

28. One of the most serious problems confronting South Africa is the chronic level of unemployment, particularly among the previously disadvantaged population groups.

29. In October 1995 14.4 million of the 26.4 million South Africans aged 15 or older were economically active, and of these, 4.2 million (or 30 per cent) were unemployed.

30. Unemployment figures illustrate the legacy of apartheid with Africans the most badly affected. Among all population groups, the female unemployment rate is markedly higher than that for men, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Unemployment rates - 1995 (%)

Gender	African	Coloured	Indian	White
Women	50.2	27.8	24.2	9.2
Men	33.6	19.7	13.3	4.5
Total	41.1	23.3	17.1	6.4

31. A significant proportion of those who are employed work in the informal sector.

Literacy rate

32. Virtually all adult white people are literate, while a quarter of adult Africans are illiterate.

Table 2. Literacy rate - 1991 (%)

	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
Literacy	77	91	95	100	82

Religion

33. The majority of South Africans (some 80 per cent) follow the Christian faith. Other faiths include traditional African religion, Hindu, Islam and Judaism.

Home language

34. The new Constitution provides status for 11 official languages. Previously only 2 (English and Afrikaans) were recognized and are still, by and large, used for official communication, although these patterns are changing. The weighting is now towards English with attempts to provide for other languages. The public broadcaster, for example, endeavours to incorporate many languages into its communications. A rapid growth in community radio stations has facilitated the better use and spread of other languages.

35. The distribution of home language according to the 1991 census is as follows:

Table 3. Home language - 1991

Language	% of population
Afrikaans	15
English	9
IsiNdebele	2
SePedi	10
SeSotho	7
SiSwati	3
XiTsonga	4
SeTswana	7
TshiVenda	2
siXhosa	18
IsiZulu	22
Other	2

Life expectancy

36. There are significant differences between population groups. Women have a longer life expectancy than men.

Table 4. Life expectancy - 1995 (years)

Race	Women	Men	All
African	68.2	63.5	65.6
Coloured	68.5	62.6	65.5
Indian	73.0	73.2	70.1
White	76.6	69.9	73.2

37. It must be noted that large numbers of women suffer from HIV/AIDS and that the number of children born HIV positive is on the increase.

Birth rate and infant mortality

38. Birth rates per 1,000 of the population are as follows (October Household Survey 1994).

Table 5. Birth rate - 1991 (per 1,000 of population)

African	Coloured	Indian	White
25.3	21.7	18.1	13.7

39. Infant mortality rates show a similar disparity between population groups, reflecting the uneven provision of medical services, lack of adequate nutrition, and poor quality of living in some communities.

Table 6. Infant mortality - 1991 (per 1,000 live births)

African	Coloured	Indian	White
54.7	36.2	9.9	7.3

Maternal mortality

40. Maternal mortality shows the same trends, but there are no reliable estimates due to poor reporting. Official figures range from 2 per 100,000 live births for Indians to 58 for Africans. However, indirect demographic techniques put the estimate at around 250 in 1991 for Africans.

Population by age group

41. South Africa has a young population: 15 per cent of the total population is aged 5 years or younger; another 21 per cent is aged from 6 to 14.

42. Among adults there is a locational gender bias in that in the peak income-earning years, the number of men in urban areas exceeds that of women, while women predominate in the non-urban areas.

Table 7. Population by gender, age and location - 1991

	0-19	20-39	40-59	60-
Urban women	3 579 000	3 459 000	1 823 000	787 000
Urban men	3 697 000	3 806 000	1 958 000	627 000
Non-urban women	5 764 000	2 917 000	1 641 000	751 000
Non-urban men	5 789 000	2 349 000	1 064 000	487 000
% of population	46.7	31.1	16.1	6.6